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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to identify factors that might be associated with teachers applying or not applying to the Tennessee Career Ladder Program. The secondary purpose was to determine if teacher evaluation attitudes influence career ladder decisions. Of the experienced teachers (N=101) participating in the study, most had applied for Career Ladder and passed the evaluation. While 69 percent were on Career Level 1, only 12 percent were on Levels 2 and 3. Of the Level 1 teachers, 77 percent were not planning to continue on to the upper levels. Comparative mean scores with teacher evaluation processes used at the state level were lower than mean scores at the local level. Findings indicated teachers' distrust of how state officials function. The teachers did not perceive the local and state evaluations to be congruent with their evaluation purposes, which appeared to explain why so many were not applying for the next step on the Career Ladder. It was concluded that communication between state evaluators and the teachers had been poor. Some teachers who experienced Career Ladder 1 did not want to subject themselves to possible professional indications that they were not qualified for advanced levels. It was concluded that the pay incentives did not improve the teachers' commitment to their profession since they felt that they were already committed. (JD)

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AN EXAMINATION OF TEACHERS' ATTITUDES OF A SIX-YEAR CAREER LADDER PROGRAM

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Introduction

Past, Present, and Future

Six years have passed since Tennessee legislatively enacted a statewide master teacher program for teaching improvements. Under the first years of teaching reforms, the Comprehensive Education Reform Act of 1984 (CERA) produced a career ladder program to reshape the professional image of elementary and secondary teachers.

The initial career-ladder undertakings of the governor and legislators represented the catalysts for changing teachers' image (Parish, 1983). Presumably, teachers had to be transformed into master teachers. The shared assumption was master teachers are professionally robed with competent credentials, certification, cognition, and competency. Therefore, to emerge as a master teacher, teachers had to be structured to know how to function as professional in classrooms.

A three-tiered career ladder program was established with the assumption that a master teacher evolves from teaching developmental processes. With a series of prescribed professional behavior experienced at three different teaching stages, teachers could gradually emerge as master teachers. Thus, Career Level I was designed for beginning (probationary), non-tenured (2-4 year

apprentices), and tenured (non-career ladder) teachers. This initial stage was structured to help teachers develop professional behaviors and demonstrate the ability to perform at the standard level. Once Career Level I was mastered, tenured teachers with 8 years or more teaching experience could opt to continue the developmental mastery process by moving to Career Level II and III. These last two phases were structured to increase teaching competencies at higher rates.

Each teaching developmental phase was undergirded with evaluation and merit pay systems that measured performances and reward results. While the appraisal system served as master teacher indicators, the merit system served as reward indices for outstanding performances. To determine competency levels, scores were initially obtained by combining and weighing performance indicators from various instruments (Furtwengler, 1987). However, as Representative Steven Cobb admitted, using conversion scales for teacher evaluation presented score differences between local and state evluators (Pipho, 1986).

Career Ladder Opposition

Determinants associated with teacher evaluation and merit pay have been challenged since the inception of the Tennessee Career Ladder. Controversial issues have

surrounded the evaluation process with who should evaluate; how to measure performances; when to evaluate, how performance assessments should influence tenure, promotion, and salary increases (Finn, 1985; Futrell, 1985). In response to some of these controversies, subsequent changes were made to include teachers in evaluation processes, reduce paperwork burden, revise rating conversion scale, and shorten the evaluation cycle process from a year to three months (Furtwengler, 1987). Currently, the evaluation system collects and combines data from four different sources (teacher candidates, principals, students, three-peer evaluation team). At least seven instruments are used for the process. Teachers' scores are derived from 18 performance indicators and 85 measurement items. To determine competency level, raw scores on differential scales are transferred and combined to a standard reporting scale of 200-800. The mastery for Level III is the total score of 600, and 700 for Level III (French, Malo, and Rakow, 1988).

Yet, despite ongoing modifications and successes with career ladder programs, political conflicts with consequential discrepancies have persisted. For example, some educators have not favored career ladder programs with bureaucratic implications. Opponents have argued that the bureaucratic processes and outcomes have contradicted

earlier intentions to improve teachers' image and salaries. Instead, teachers are treated as nonprofessionals who have to be coaxed into performing effectively. According to some opponents, layers of the bureaucratic structures have eliminated teachers' professional judgements in centralized decision-making processes. Rather than recognizing excellent teaching, career ladder has damaged pedagogical ethos (Rosenholtz, 1985).

Appraisal and merit pay systems have been harshly criticized for creating a hostile and competitive environment for teachers. Teachers find themselves competing for categorical teaching tracks. As a result, they eventually mistrust one another, because there are stratified teaching differences. Purportedly, career ladder structures have not encouraged collegial relationships (Barker & Klein, 1983; Johnson, 1984). Doyle and Hartle (1985) pointed out that teachers do not like to compare themselves to one another, and they do not want a competitive environment created for them. Other disappointing results have shown teachers view the evaluation performances as staged behaviors in concert with standards. Therefore, perfunctory behaviors become no more than an expected routine performance. Since some teachers do not equate merit pay with excellent teaching, the

credibility with performance-based compensation systems is lost.

Opponents have also blamed the performance-based compensation system for supporting a hostile environment between administrators and teachers. Since administrators are expected to make decisions about teachers' promotions, retention, and termination, teachers tend to mistrust administrators. To teachers, principals' evaluations symbolize power over teachers. Thus, it is difficult for teachers to accept evaluations both as a helpful and dismissal tool (Barker & Klein, 1983; Lieberman, 1985; Martin, 1987).

The Impact of Tennessee Career Ladder Program on Teachers

There is no empirical evidence that career ladder programs have significantly influenced teachers' commitment toward teaching. What is clear, however, is while some career ladder programs during first-wave reforms have failed (Berry & Ginsberg, 1990), the Tennessee Career Ladder Program has managed to stay alive. Perhaps, this endurance is an indicator that the teachers want to be rewarded for excellent teaching (Alexander, 1988). In assessing the impact of the Career Program on Tennessee teachers, Reddick & Peach (1985) found Tennessee teachers favoring the Career Ladder Program, because it enabled them to become effective

teachers. However, the teachers did not particularly think the program served as an incentive to recruit or retain teachers in the profession. More significantly, the teachers felt the differential pay would cause more problems among teachers. French, Malo, and Rakow (1988) found that teachers who had experienced the program felt the process enabled them to become more cognizant about teaching. It seems that teachers became more effacious when they have to reflect on teaching processes. The authors also found that teachers want peer evaluation input. However, with principals' evaluations, consistent high ratings on teachers showed very little discrimination. Other studies on principals evaluation of teachers have also supported this finding (Martin, 1987, 1988). Do these consistent findings suggest principals do not understand the instructional leadership role? If so, will principals be prepared to meet the demands of third-wave reforms with teacher empowerment?

Purpose of Study

As a pilot study, the primary purpose was to identify factors that might be associated with application and non-application to the Tennessee Career Ladder Program. The secondary purpose was to determine if teacher evaluation attitudes influence career ladder decision.

Nine research questions guided the study:

1. Are most of the respondents on Career Ladder?
2. Why have the teachers applied for Career Ladder?
3. Why have the teachers not applied for Career Ladder?
4. Do the teachers with Career Ladder I or II plan to continue the process?
5. What factors are indentified for not continuing the subsequent steps?
6. Do the respondents' attitudes about teacher evaluations tend to influence career ladder decisions?
7. Are there significant teacher evaluation differences between career ladder groups and non-career ladder teachers?
8. To what extent are the teachers satisfied with the evaluation processes at the state and local level?
9. Are there significant state and local differences with evaluation processes?

Instrumentation

In light of the nine research questions addressed by the study, a questionnaire with three scales was designed by the author. The survey instrument assessed teaching background data, career ladder status, and open-ended career ladder data. The survey also included ten item statements on teacher evaluations, and nine item statements on evaluation

processes used at the state and local level. Attitude measures of teacher evaluation were rated on a 5-point Likert scale of agreement. A 5-point Likert scale of satisfaction with evaluation processes at the state and local level was employed. Cronbach's alpha reliability for teacher evaluation attitudes was .75 and .84 for evaluation processes.

On the first scale (Career Ladder), five items consisted of "yes" and "no" responses to Career Ladder application, Career Ladder results, and Career Ladder continuation. The scale was also designed with three open-ended contingency questions from previous questions to identify application and continuation responses. The responses were subsequently clustered into four categorical reasons for non-application, three categories for continuation, and seven categories for non-continuation. A category was created for "don't know" responses and no response.

Subjects

One hundred and one teachers from eight rural school districts located in surrounding areas of the Middle Tennessee region volunteered to participate in the first phase of this study. A majority (78%) of the respondents were females, and 58% were elementary teachers. A large percentage (40%) had teaching experience ranging from eleven

to twenty years. Only 8% of the respondents were on Level II, while 42% were on Level III.

Data Analyses

First, a series of analysis of variances (ANOVA's) tests were conducted to test the effects of grade level teaching experiences, and career status on career decisions, teacher evaluations attitudes, and satisfaction with evaluation processes. Comparative means scores with Career Ladder and non-Career Ladder respondents were examined for significant differences. The level of significance was set at .05. A series of correlations were performed to examine influential factors associated with Career Ladder decisions, possible relationships between Career Ladder decisions and teacher evaluation attitudes, and satisfaction with local and state evaluation processes.

Descriptive Summary

As the demographic data show in Table 1, most of the respondents had applied for Career Ladder and passed the evaluation. While 69% were on Career Ladder Level I, only 12% were on Level II and III. When the Career Ladder respondents were asked if they planned to continue the process, 77% were not planning to pursue Career Level II or III. Table 2 shows how the reasons were clustered and the percentages in each of the categories. As presented, the

TABLE 1
Demographic data on teacher sample

Characteristics	N	%
Male	22	22
Female	79	78
Teaching Experience		
3 years of less	8	9
4-10 years	31	33
11-20 years	37	40
21 years or more	17	18
Teaching Grade Level		
Kindergarten	4	4
Elementary	54	58
Secondary	29	31
Other	6	7
Career Ladder Level Status		
0	17	19
1st	61	69
2nd	7	8
3rd	3	4

TABLE 2
Teachers' decisions for advancement and non-advancement with the Career Ladder Program

Career Ladder Decision	N	%
Non-application		
1. Ineligible	15	21
2. Stressful work	2	3
3. Contradictions of teaching beliefs	3	4
4. Work surplus	1	1
5. No response	50	71
Continuation		
1. Self-satisfaction/ professional growth	4	25
2. Financial improvement	11	69
3. State's responsibility	1	6
Non-Continuation		
1. Nonsense	2	6
2. Work surplus/stress/time	15	44
3. Evaluation inconsistencies	3	9
4. Disagreement with purpose to prove/staged behaviors/ not the problem beliefs	5	14
5. Dislikes Career Program/waste of time	2	6
6. Pay not commensurate with work	2	6
7. Ineligible	3	9
8. No response	2	6

primary reason for not applying was due to ineligibility. After a Career Ladder Level is attained, the process is discontinued due to the amount of work, stress, and time involved. Some of these respondents viewed teaching time more valuable than Career Level preparation time.

Comparative mean scores with teacher evaluation processes used at the state level were lower than mean scores at the local level. It can be seen in Table 3, however, teachers' attitudes about evaluation in relation to professional improvement were not perceived highly. It cannot be overlooked that the low mean scores presented in Table 4 on satisfaction with state evaluations strongly suggest teachers' distrust with how state officials function.

Extremely low correlations were found between the teacher evaluation attitude and evaluation processes at the local and state level. A closer examination of negative findings suggested the teachers did not perceive the local and state evaluations to be congruent with their evaluation purposes. This premise was more pronounced with reasons for not applying for the next step on Career Ladder. In fact, 35% of the respondents not applying for subsequent steps perceived the program as nonsense. Twenty-four percent felt the work surplus, stress, and time was not worth the effort, while 24% disagreed with the purposes of the program.

TABLE 3
Means and standard deviations of teachers' attitudes about teacher evaluations

Teacher Evaluation Attitudes	N	Mean	SD
1. I enjoy being evaluated, because teacher evaluations identify my strengths and weaknesses.	88	2.8	1.1
2. With teacher evaluations, I know I have my supervisor's support.	88	3.1	1.1
3. With teacher evaluations, I know I have my principal's support.	88	3.6	1.1
4. When teachers are to be evaluated, I have observed teachers making extra preparations to be effective.	87	4.3	0.8
5. Because teacher evaluations have improved my teaching, I feel that I am a better teacher.	87	3.0	1.1
6. Teacher evaluations should be used for all teachers in the profession.	85	3.9	1.1
7. Teacher evaluations at the state level have helped to improve school systems at the local level.	88	2.3	1.2
8. With teacher evaluations, I experience teaching anxiety.	88	3.4	1.2
9. After I am evaluated, I enjoy having the post-observation conferences.	86	3.0	1.1
10. Teacher evaluations should be used to determine teaching performances.	88	3.0	1.2

Note. Attitudes were on a 5-Point Likert Scale of agreement from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

TABLE 4
Comparative Mean Scores of evaluation processes at local and state levels

		Local			State		
		N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
1.	Communication	86	3.6	1.3	73	2.4	1.1
2.	Feedback Responses	87	3.5	1.2	73	2.4	1.1
3.	Leadership	87	3.5	1.2	72	2.5	1.1
4.	Trust/Confidence	87	3.7	1.3	73	2.6	1.1
5.	Cooperation	87	3.7	1.1	73	2.7	1.1
6.	Pre-Observation Conf.	82	3.5	1.1	69	2.8	1.0
7.	Post-Observation Conf.	83	3.6	1.2	69	2.8	1.0
8.	Observations	88	3.7	1.2	68	2.7	1.1
9.	Evaluations	84	3.7	1.1	68	2.7	1.0

Note. Mean scores are based on a 5-Point Likert Scale ranging from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied).

However, the intercorrelations among state evaluation variables were relatively high. For example, the feedback responses were postively related to communication (r=.85), leadership (r=.73), and trust/confidence (r=.73). The greater the satisfaction with how the state conducted pre/post observation conferences with the teachers, the greater the cooperation (r=.81). Pre/post observational behaviors also influenced satisfactions with observations (r=.81) and evaluations (r=.80). Comparatively, the satisfaction with communication skills were more highly related with state evaluation processes than the other process variables were. Similar coefficient finding were found among the local evaluation variables. However, higher correlations were found with local level variables (r=.64 to r=.94).

Further examinations revealed teaching experience, teaching level, and career level status were hardly influential factors in evaluation attitudes and satisfaction processes. In fact, most of the coefficients showed low negative correlations.

Attitudes about teacher evaluation were more related to evaluation processes at the local level than at the state level. Teachers felt they had more support at the local lével with feedback responses (r=.70, p=.000) and trust/confidence (r=.64) than at the state level. The

perceived support tended to be gained with local post-observation conferences (r=.65) and observations (r=.66) than with the state.

Further examination of influential factors on evaluation attitudes and satisfaction with evaluation processes yielded unexpected results. Non-application reasons for Career Ladder did not seen to influence teachers' attitudes about evaluations or their satisfaction with evaluation processes. A similar finding was noted with continuation and non-continuation reasons with Career Ladder. As previously cited, work samples, stress, and time were frequently (35%) stated for non-continuation. Evaluation inconsistencies (24%) and disagreement (24%) with program purposes to prove good teaching were also stated frequently. Those teachers who intended to continue the process were primarily interested in financial improvement (73%), while 20% felt that it was the state's responsibility to reward teaching. What the data infer is when evaluation decisions are removed from the local level, the purposes and processes became isolated and bureaucratic for teachers. Perhaps, at the local level, the teachers have an opportunity to develop a close relationship with people involved in evaluation processes. Conversely, the Career Ladder Program is perceived as a mechanical process in which teachers are judged and not helped.

The data were also examined for significant differences between Career Ladder applicants and teacher evaluation attitudes and state/local evaluation processes. I-test results yielded no significant differences between applicants' and non-applicants' responses. For example, both groups did not perceive teacher evalautions as being helpful to identify strengths and weaknesses, t (85)=.50, p>.62. Although the applicants' mean score for not perceiving evaluations as a determinant of performance was lower than non-applicants, no significant difference was found, t (87)=.90, p=.37. In fact, non-applicants' mean scores on teacher evaluation tended to be higher than applicants' mean scores. Similar findings were found with the groups' responses with local and state evaluation processes. Responses to how local and state conducted evaluations did not differ significantly with applicant groups. However, it was observed that non-applicants tended to be more satisfied with local evaluation, while applicants tend to be more satisfied with state evaluations. Perhaps this finding is due to the applicants' evaluation experiences at both levels.

Some results from one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) yielded significant differences between Career Ladder Level groups and application to the program (F (3, 84)=21.60, p=.000). However, the groups levels did not have a

significant effect on non-application reasons ($F(3,62)=3.0$, $p>.10$). In was also observed that the career group levels did not have a significant effect on teacher evaluation attitudes. There were no significant differences between group levels and evaluation attitudes. These findings suggest the teacher tended to associate the efforts of the evaluation with them as teachers, rather than being a part of a state program. Moreover, similar findings were noted with the groups' satisfaction with evaluation processes at the local and state level. Other ANOVA results showed while experience had a significant effect on the career level ($F(2, 59)=7.3$, $p<.001$), teaching level had no significant effect ($F(3,59)=.16$, $p>.92$).

CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions were drawn from this study. One important conclusion was the communication between state evaluators and the teacher has been poor. While the Career Ladder Program has attempted to filter out the "bugs" in the program, it has failed to translate the operation of the program into interactive units with teachers. After six years of trying to transform the teachers into master teachers, the impact of the program on the teachers alienated teachers from understanding intended purposes.

Another conclusion from the study was that the teachers were not against being evaluated to improve instruction. Rather, they were against the professional differential inferences. That is, Career Ladder made them feel as if some teachers who perceived themselves effective had no worth. To protect their professional esteem some of the teachers were afraid to apply for the program. As a result, their only defense was not to apply. Some teachers who had experienced Career Ladder did not want to further subject themselves to possible professional indignations that they were not qualified for advanced levels. The risks and stress caused these teachers to withdraw from the process. It can be concluded that the pay incentives have not been the remedy for the teachers to improve. It was not the pay that made them want to improve, rather commitment and support. The teachers felt they were already committed. As a result, the state was obligated to pay higher salaries for quality services already rendered.

On a positive note, the findings from this study do suggest that the Career Ladder Program has evoked teaching consciousness among the teachers. It has caused them to think about their teaching performances in relation to student learning. If the teachers know they have support with their efforts, they don't resent the medicine prescription for improvement.

The final conclusion was that the teachers wanted to improve at the local level with people whom they trust. The closer the help, the more improvement can take place. Perhaps third-wave reforms with site-based management will reflect more teaching improvement differences than a decade ago. It is obviously clear from the findings that moving teaching reforms to the local level will serve teachers more proficiently than at the state level. How the Career Ladder Program will function with third-wave reforms remains unclear. The Governor of Tennessee has packaged and marketed the goals and objectives of the 21st Century Challenge Program . What has been partially unveiled about the Career Ladder Program is the need to change teachers' negative image of the program by giving teachers more feedback. Moreover, the program plans to link professional development with evaluations. Evaluations as determinants of performances will not be excluded.

Based on the findings from this study, the author will conduct a subsequent study to test the effects of efficacy treatments on non-applicant Career Ladder teachers. The purpose of the experimental study will be to see if non-applicants can develop high efficacy for Career Ladder application and continuation.

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